

GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNSEL ON REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS (GACRI)

MEMBERS MEETING

April 6, 2017

MINUTES

Attendants:

GACRI Members: Jeff Goldman (Chair), Lisa Brennan, Eva Milona, Kerby Roberson, Ernani DeAraujo, Cynthia Mark, Ed Wang, Albion Calaj, Ajit Nagral, Marjean Perhot.

ORI/EOHHS staff: Mary Truong, Falah Hashem, Patti Mackin, and Sharon Togerson

The meeting was called to order at 1:00pm.

Items discussed:

1) Welcome and Introductions:

GACRI Chair Jeff Goldman welcomed members and Executive Office of Health and Human Services' Representatives. Jeff emphasized that today's meeting will be focused on devising a plan to harness current energy surrounding advocacy calls of support to refugee and immigrant populations. Jeff answered calls from Governor's Office on behalf of GACRI to assist with legal interpretation of January 27, 2017 White House Executive Order number 13769 (Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States). He also helped Governor Office in drafting part of Governor's Baker letter to DHS Secretary, John Kelly.

2) GACRI Chair Meeting with EOHHS Secretary Sudders

Jeff was advised by Governor Office to Meet with EOHHS Secretary Sudders to listen to her thoughts in regards to GACRI role in the current phase of immigration discussion. For that reason March 2017 GACRI meeting was postponed until Chair meets with Secretary Sudders. Secretary Sudders cares a lot about GACRI's work and refugee and immigrant populations in Massachusetts. Due to scheduling conflict, Secretary Sudders couldn't join the meeting today, but her staff were able to and GACRI appreciate EOHHS involvement in this process.

3) Identify Areas that GACRI Could Bring to Governor's attention

Jeff invited members to share their thoughts in regards to areas that can be brought to Governor's attention. Undersecretary Mackin suggested identifying events that are dedicated to recognize refugees and immigrants contributions, for example World Refugee Day on June 20, 2017. These events can be used to educate the public and ease the fear among refugee and immigrant populations.

Eva Millona talked about the leadership role of Governor Baker to address Massachusetts concerns in regards to Executive Order 13769 that he compiled in his letter to DHS secretary Kelly. Eva also talked about how Secretary Sudders been very supportive. Eva suggested that GACRI should focus on drafting agenda that highlight refugees and immigrants integration and the contribution of foreign born individuals in economic development and marketing the message that foreign born individuals are not the problem, but the solution. Jeff indicates that all what have mentioned are good ideas especially in light of the need of education to the public. What would be the theme stories?

Marjean Perhot indicated that some resettlement agencies may close out as a result of decrease in number of refugee arrivals. Governor may support resettlement cause by advocating to increase federal funding to these agencies. Despite the decrease in overseas refugee arrivals, Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Boston is serving 360 clients on monthly basis.

Eva Millona supported the idea of assisting agencies at risk of federal funding cuts and advocated for a state funding to cover that loss and to be awarded to ORI.

Marjean Perhot recommended inviting representatives from refugee and immigrant population in the event to educate public about the difference.

On the other hand, Ed Wang advised to move forward with today's refugee is tomorrow's immigrant messaging. Ed highlights the positive impact of Governor Baker's letter to Secretary Kelly as it brought attention to refugees and the unaccompanied children. He applauded the state support for Welcome Kit Project, but indicated that state can do more in support of refugee and immigrant population by supporting additional project for example Financial Literacy Project. Ed agrees that there a lot of people are willing to help refugees and immigrants population and there many opportunities for public-private partnership to accomplish that. On other note, Ed referred to public concerns in regards to sanctuary city/state topic.

Kerby affirmed that Governor can support service providers to help refugees. Kerby also highlighted that the public is concerned about sanctuary city/state issue and shared example of incoordination between these cities and law enforcement as one individual detained by ICE after traffic violation incident.

Marjean agreed that people has concerns and Eva Millona added that this issue affect both documented and undocumented immigrants. Jeff stated that he cannot advise the Governor on sanctuary cities issues.

Eva Millona, GACRI can encourage Governor Baker and Speaker DeLeo to support "Safe Communities Act" that was concurred by the House. GACRI can also provide clarifications in regards to this bill. Jeff

and Undersecretary Mackin preferred that clarifications about the bill would be handled by Governor's legal team.

Sharon Torgerson, EOHHS Assistant Secretary of Communications and External Affairs asked GACRI members about any feedback they may have received from constituency in regards to the new hotline to report incidents of bias-motivated threats, harassment, and violence (1-800-994-3228). Cynthia indicated that feedback received was not related to the hotline, but rather stories about individuals experiencing bias in public transportation and other places. On other note, many individuals expressed fear in dealing with authorities because they cannot differentiate between federal and state government. Refugee and immigrant populations need to receive messaging that state agencies are safe.

New GACRI Member Ajit suggested that GACRI advises the Governor on importance of economic development.

Jeff confirmed that Governor Baker supports refugees and immigrants to climb the economic ladder. The Governor is happy to happy if GACRI provides him with similar ideas to support.

Eva Millona highlighted another bill for GACRI to suggest to the Governor to support. This bill was concurred by the Senate "An Act to increase access to healthcare in underserved areas of Massachusetts." This bill aims to mobilize skilled practitioners trained abroad to help meet Mass. healthcare needs. This bill will serve the two objectives for those people including economic development and integration.

Undersecretary Mackin Governor Baker included \$4 Million program "Learn to Earn" in his administration budget with the aim to help those looking for work to acquire skills to obtain that job. This will also provide scholarships for training that leads to certificate in certain fields.

Eva Millona appraised that and advocated if part of that funding will support ORI efforts.

Jeff noted that Secretary Sudders would like to have her office help by developing calendar of events that recognize and celebrate the refugee and immigrant contributions, a much needed topics to educate the public about. The most celebrated event is the "World Refugee Day" on June 20th, how GACRI would help with planning for this event.

Cynthia emphasized on the importance of publicizing this event and messaging to circulated weeks in advance of the event(s). Lisa Brennan mentioned that Ascentria Care Alliance celebrates World Refugee Day in Worcester every year.

Eva Millona added that MIRA also celebrates immigrant contributions every year and can help by sharing stories of those that need help as well as stories that show success.

Jeff referred to his conversation with Sec. Sudders in regards to the event. There are no expenses that can be big for this event. Many entities planned for this event, but need to have educational theme. EOHHS will help with compiling information in a calendar of events and will work on promoting it. What GACRI suggest in terms of planning for the events. Should events be hosted in three different locations that need

funding for example West Springfield or Pittsfield? How can GACRI help with June 20th event? What kind of event would it be? What GACRI can do to help? How about letting people meet refugees).

Kerby suggested that someone needs to own this event in terms of planning. Both Assistant Secretary Torgerson and Millona expressed interest to co-own the planning piece. New GACRI Member Albion suggested reaching out to universities to help out with leg work for the event.

Lisa Brennan agreed and added Universities can help design beautiful logos for refugees or a “Welcome” ribbon.” Albion added or even T-Shirts. Kerby emphasized on the event theme to highlight the contributions of immigrants and liked the idea to include universities in this effort and team up with others. Millona also liked involving universities in this effort especially they have excellent track record supporting refugees and immigrants by providing scholarships.

ORI Executive Director Truong shared that Wheaton College have created Scholarships to support students for the banned six countries. Jeff was excited that whole GACRI members support the event idea. Theme of the event will be to educate the public about refugee and immigrant contributions. There are a lot of people who want to help with private and public efforts to fund ORI and service providers.

Undersecretary Mackin suggested using the “World Refugee Day” symbol. Lisa Brennan suggested advocating for increasing the cap on refugee numbers for the following years.

Albion shared that as former refugee from Kosovo he knows what it is like to need help. So much education is needed not only in the area of financial literacy alone, but also to learn about their rights in the U.S.

Millona also suggested that GACRI can advocate for ORI to receive additional funding. ORI used to receive \$2 Million in state appropriations and was able to host statewide event to highlight refugees and immigrants contributions.

Meeting adjourned at 2:25pm